

House Republicans Fail to Respond to Zika Virus

GOP Supplemental Bill is An Unserious Effort to Address the Public Health Crisis

Three months ago, President Obama requested \$1.9 billion in an emergency supplemental appropriation to prepare for and contain the spread of the Zika virus. Instead of responding quickly and working with the Obama Administration, House Republicans have ignored this growing public health crisis for months. As a result, more than 1,200 Americans have been infected by the virus, including more than 110 pregnant women.

Now, House Republicans are bringing to the Floor a \$622 million funding bill, providing less than a third of the funding requested by President Obama. Unlike the bipartisan Murray-Blunt Amendment, which provides \$1.1 billion in emergency funding and was advanced by the Senate this week, the House Republican proposal does not provide the resources necessary to tackle the immediate and ongoing crisis in Puerto Rico or prepare vulnerable cities and states in the South.

Here's a look at how the House Republican bill fails to address this public health crisis:

- Underfunds the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) response efforts by \$573 million, severely limiting their ability to respond domestically and internationally to prevent, detect, and respond to Zika;
- Provides \$85 million less than the President requested to the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), limiting their ability to develop new vaccines and diagnostic tests;
- Does not provide Medicaid assistance to territories, including Puerto Rico, to support health services for pregnant women at risk of Zika and for children with microcephaly;
- Only provides funding for Fiscal Year 2016, which means that funds cannot be used past September 30, 2016, even though health experts expect the Zika crisis to last far beyond that date;
- Fails to allow contributions to international organizations such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF, severely hampering a world-wide response to the epidemic.

A coalition of 60 national health and medical organizations, led by the March of Dimes, has voiced their opposition to the House Republican proposal:

“This initiative fails to provide appropriate resources to address any of the needed public health efforts to protect pregnant women and their infants from Zika virus... Our nation has no time to waste. Even now, it will require an extraordinary effort to move emergency funds into the field to make a meaningful difference in Zika prevention this summer.” [Letter to Members of Congress, 5/18/16]

While several Republicans have expressed concerns over the lack of action on this issue, the bill House Republicans leaders are bringing to the House Floor this week is not an adequate response to this crisis.

Steve Womack (R-AR): “[I]f we fail to deal with the issue and there are hardships that would be posed on society in this country, you wouldn’t be able to compute those costs... It’s a **dice roll to get** into an argument about Zika funding and **running the risk in having something catastrophic happen and we own it.**” [Politico, [5/17/16](#)]

Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL): “All Members of Congress should **take this virus seriously and put aside partisanship**—time is not on our side as the summer months draw near.” [Press Release, [5/11/16](#)]

Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL): “[Congress is] going to have to **explain to people why it is that we sat around for weeks and did nothing** on something of this magnitude.” [Huffington Post, [4/28/16](#)]

Failure to act quickly has put American lives at risk. It’s time for Republicans to take this emergency seriously, before more Americans are infected.

“‘When you’ve got an emergency situation, **you really need to get funding as quickly as you possibly can,**’ said Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. ‘**We’re running out of time.**’” [Washington Post, [5/17/16](#)]

Instead of working with House Democrats and the Obama Administration to fully fund a response to the growing public health crisis, House Republicans have offered an inadequate bill that will not be signed into law. House Republicans should work with Democrats on a bipartisan basis – as the Senate is doing this week – to pass legislation that responds to the Zika virus and helps keep Americans healthy and safe.